

Michigan Senate

Testimony

June 11, 2009

Thank you Mr. Chair (Wayne Kuipers) for this opportunity to come before you and the members of the Michigan Senate Education Committee. My name is Tony Colón; born and raised in Brooklyn, New York; my parents were from the beautiful island of Puerto Rico and that would make me a "Nuyorican".

I have been an educator for over 35 years. For all but 3 of those years, I've served in low-income communities among the poor with little resources but rich in heart and spirit. I have been a teacher, a principal, a director of special education, a vice president of education for the largest Hispanic Civil Rights organization in the country, an education investment strategist and senior manager in an education consultant firm. For the past 10 years, I've been an active advocate in the education reform movement and journeyed from classroom teacher to boardroom member.

During the last ten years, I've immersed myself in the Charter School movement. During my 6-year tenure at the National Council of La Raza, we were able to raise over \$ 40 million to develop a Charter School initiative that funded and helped develop over 50 Hispanic serving community-based Charter Schools in more than 15 states in these United States; I was part of the founding board of the National Alliance for Public charter schools, the leading national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. I became the principal of an Hispanic serving charter school in Oakland CA., recently received a blue ribbon award for excellence by the U.S. Department of Education (attachment). I was appointed to serve on the Washington, DC Charter School Authorizing Board by then Mayor Anthony Williams and served for 4 years until 2008. I am currently, chairman of the Board for the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence.

Over the past 35 years I have experienced the good, the bad and the ugly and hopefully learned from my experiences not to make the same mistakes more

than once. I've learned that if you are poor, low-income and living in an urban city probably a person of color, but not always, your chances for a quality education diminish proportionately to your economic situation and social status. I've learned that: there is an education crisis and a dysfunctional traditional public school system that needs to be placed "under construction" and redesigned not just reformed. To make real progress in transforming our public schools to meet 21st century demands, a comprehensive solution is needed – not one that helps just a handful of schools, but one that works for the entire state.

I've learned that all children can learn provided that their educational experience consists of and exposes them to:

- A Quality school
- Quality teachers
- Engaged parents/guardians and families
- A quality instructional educational program

Our country's future success, Michigan's future success and our children's' future success depends on developing the kind of public schools that will ensure our children and future generations have the skills to succeed in the fiercely competitive and ever-evolving 21st century global economy.

We need change because just as Michigan must diversify its economy, it must also diversify its public schools in order to provide the right educational choice for every child.

Despite a record level of taxpayer investment, too many of our schools are failing too many of our students. While the state's largest school district has the worst graduation rate of any city in the nation, for example, this education challenge affects every corner of the state. Here are some facts:

- Dropout crisis – a 25% high school graduation rate in Detroit Public Schools and a statewide average of 43% for African Americans and Hispanic respectively.
- Michigan's merit curriculum implementation has many challenges one of which is the that 30% of 9th graders failed Algebra – not eligible for diploma
- State wide average for 4th grade reading scores (percent proficient) is
 - 39% - Whites
 - 12% - African Americans
 - 19% Hispanics
- State wide average for 4th grade math scores (percent proficient) is

- 44% - Whites
- 26% - African Americans
- 26% Hispanics

In an October, 2008 publication, *America's Vanishing Potential: The Case for PreK-3rd Education* by, the Foundation for Child Development reports that:

- By the 4th grade fewer than 1/3 of all American children are reading at or above grade level. They are unlikely ever to catch up.
- By the 4th grade fewer than 15% of Hispanic children are reading at or above grade level. They are unlikely ever to catch up.
- By the 4th grade fewer than 12% of African American children are reading at or above grade level. They are unlikely ever to catch up.

The early **vanishing potential** of American children is unacceptable.

The demise of the great American education system is affecting all Americans both young and old.

It is not surprising that President Obama and his team of economic advisors has made education one of the pillars for the recovery of the American economy.

We can make an argument for choice and neighborhood schools based on facts about our current traditional system of education and we can make the same argument based on the successes of new neighborhood schools today.

"Community based schools" is an innovative initiative providing more flexibility and choice in education throughout the United States. These new schools will supplement the existing public education system by expanding options and creating a more diverse set of public schools from which parents and families can choose to send their students.

While community based schools would have open enrollment, certified teachers, and adhere to the state's graduation requirements, they would also have the flexibility to create more individualized learning environments and meet the particular needs of their students. These types of schools could include:

- Family educational service centers;
- Early childhood learning centers;
- Neighborhood elementary, middle or high schools;
- Career education high schools;
- Middle colleges;
- Dropout recovery centers; or
- Virtual schools.

Through the power of choice, competition and accountability, the neighborhood public school is at work – but slowly. This combination is a proven solution that

increases parental involvement and boosts student achievement by empowering families.

There are a number of characteristics of community-based schools that foster and promote high student performance and achievement. Let me name a few:

- Community based schools are unique public schools that foster a partnership between parents, teachers and students to create an environment in which parents can be more involved, teachers are given the freedom and flexibility to innovate and students are provided the structure they need to learn.
- Community based schools are fully public schools, which are given the ability to innovate in return for greater accountability for improved learning. All charter school students attend for free and are chosen by lottery when demand outpaces availability.
- Community based schools are able to innovate and make quick effective changes to help students in a rapidly changing world, allowing the schools to prepare students to succeed in the new global economy
- Giving schools more autonomy in exchange for greater accountability for improved student achievement. Holding students, teachers, and parents accountable for improving student achievement

There are studies and reports that clearly point to the increase in student achievement and high performance of charter schools. A wealth of anecdotal information as well that should not be ignored.

For example, Charter schools across Michigan had a 12% higher graduation rate than host school districts. And charter schools in Detroit outperformed their peers on 24 of the 27 MEAP tests.

There is also an extensive list of Charter Management organizations and independent community based schools that are high performing.

Outstanding Charter and Community based schools:

Green Dot Public Schools – CA
Cesar Chavez Academy – Pueblo
Aspire Public Schools - Ca
Amistad Academy - MA
Uncommon Schools
KIPP - National
Accelerated Schools - CA
Seed School - DC
PUC (People Uplifting communities) – CA
Cristo Rey Schools – National
Oakland Charter Academy – CA

The huge difference in academic performance between students from different economic circumstances and racial/ethnic backgrounds is what we call the **achievement gap**.

Poor academic performance has a direct and serious impact on a student's adult life. Dropouts are more likely to become and stay jobless, will enjoy dramatically lower lifetime earnings, and are far more likely to be unemployed and incarcerated.

For example-

- High school graduates on average live up to 7 years longer than high school dropouts.
- College graduates out earn high school graduates by 73% in their lifetime.
- One in nine black men between 20-34 are incarcerated; a black male is more likely to be in prison than to have a post-graduate degree.

The achievement gap is not some irrelevant statistic, it is proof that our public education system is consistently failing our children and drastically reducing their chances to compete and succeed as adults.

The Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools reports the following data on the achievement gap:

International Gap

- 1. In 1970, the United States had 30% of the world's college graduates, now has only 15%**
 - "Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring US Students Receive a World-Class Education," National Governors Association, 2008, pg. 11.
- 2. American 15 year-olds' math skills rank 25th internationally**
 - Stephane Baldi, et al. "Highlights from PISA 2006: Performance of U.S. 15-Year-Old Students in Science and Mathematics Literacy in an International Context." The National Center for Education Statistics (2007)
<http://nces.ed.gov/PUBSEARCH/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2008016>

Racial Gap

- 1. By 4th grade, Black and Latino students are on average nearly 3 years behind their White and Asian counterparts**
 - The Nation's Report Card, The National Center for Education Statistics
<http://nces.ed.gov/NATIONSREPORTCARD/>
- 2. Black and Latino students are 2-3x more likely to have below basic skills in reading and math**
 - NCES, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Summary Data Tables, data for public schools
- 3. Barely half of African American and Latino students graduate from high school, with Latinos graduating at 58%, African Americans at 55%, and their white counterparts at 78%**
 - Alliance for Excellent Education. "Understanding High School Graduation Rates in the United States." (2008)

http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/understanding_HSgradrates

4. **One in nine black men between 20-34 are incarcerated; a black male is more likely to be in prison than to have a post-graduate degree.**

- Warren, Jenifer, et al. "One in 100: Behind Bars in America." Pew Center on the States (2008)
http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=35904

Income Gap / Interaction of Racial and Income Gap

5. **90% of incoming freshman at the top 150 colleges come from families in the top half of U.S. annual income**

- The Educational Testing Service <http://www.ets.org/>

6. **Only 9% of students in Tier 1 (146 most selective) colleges were from the bottom half of the income distribution**

- National Center for Education Statistics; Center for Education Policy, NAEP data for public schools, College Board

7. **70% of people in top 10% income bracket have at least a bachelor's degree**

- McKinsey Global Institute; CPI
http://eep.3.cdn.net/73323d7f685616b700_n6m6bfwxx.pdf

Economic/Individual Impact

8. **If we closed the achievement gap in the 15 years following *A Nation at Risk*:**

- **2008 GDP gain from closing international gap: \$1.3 - \$2.3 trillion (9-16% of GDP)**

There used to be a time when that was a lot of money

- **2008 GDP gain from closing racial gap: \$310 - \$525 billion (2-4% of GDP)**
- **2008 GDP gain from closing income gap: \$400 - \$670 billion (3-5% of GDP)**
- Cross-Country growth GDP McKinsey Model; All models assume gap was closed by 1998.
http://eep.3cdn.net/73323d7f685616b700_n6m6fwxx.pdf

9. Someone with a college degree makes 73% more over a lifetime than someone with only a high school degree

- NELS 1988: Baum and Payea, "Education Pays: the Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society," (2004), The College Board

10. A high school dropout is 5-8x more likely to be incarcerated than a college graduate

- Enrico Moretti, "Crime and the Costs of Criminal Justice." The Price We Pay, 2007; Pew Center on the States, "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008"

11. A 10% increase in high school graduation rates would reduce murder rates by 20%

- Lochner, Lance and Enrico Moretti. "The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports." National Bureau of Economic

12. High school graduates live up to 7 years longer than high school dropouts

- Belfield, Clive and Henry M. Levins, eds. *The Price we Pay*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007
<http://www.brookings.edu/press/Books/2007/pricewepay.aspx>

13. In Dallas, students who had three consecutive years of effective teachers improved their math test scores by 21 points, students with three years of ineffective teachers fell 30 points behind

- Bembry, Karen L. et al. "Policy Implications of Long-term Teacher Effects on Student Achievement." Dallas Independent School District (1998)
http://www.dallasisd.org/depts/inst_research/aer98rm1/aer98rm1.html

14. Reading and Math scores improved 40 to 50% faster with teachers who reported high levels of parent outreach and participation

Is the achievement gap closing? According to David Whitman in his new book, *Sweating The Small Stuff*, "Professor David Armor of George Mason University has calculated how long it would take whites and blacks students to reach 100% proficiency under NAEP standards (National Assessment of Educational Standards) if 8th grade students in the nation continued to raise their achievement levels at the same pace as they have for the last decade. If recent progress continues, he found, white students would become 100% proficient 61 years from now. Black students would all achieve proficiency in about 180 years (e-mail message to author, January 8, 2007)

Choice helps address the achievement gap.

I believe that choice should not be limited to those who can afford a quality education, but also to those who cannot afford it: usually poor, low-income, underserved families and their children.

It is my vision that one day, every child in America – regardless of their socio-economic background and their race and ethnicity - will attend a school that fits their educational needs and equips them with the skills that they need to be productive members of our economy and our democracy. I believe that choice in education is one of the strategies necessary to make this vision a reality.

- Choice is a right not a privilege
- Choice is for all not just a few

Finally, let me conclude with the Oakland Charter Academy's Statement of Beliefs

Located: Oakland, CA

Grades: 6-12

Population: 100% Hispanic

Economic Status: Low-income

Oakland Charter Academies : Statement of Beliefs

We believe ... Oakland Charter Academies will address the regional and national need for improved performance in science, English, History and mathematics among all students, and for the targeted student population in particular.

We believe ... that all students can be successful in a rigorous educational program when provided with a relevant curricular model, demanding curriculum, and support that meets specific student needs.

We believe ... that students will thrive in a small school environment that is safe and supportive.

We believe ... that students will excel in a program that focuses on academics and implements an innovative schedule that allows for small class sizes and personal attention to each student.

We believe... that all students will be successful when provided with an effective standards based curriculum.

We believe... that all students can reach high levels of performance regardless of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic levels.

We believe... that Students will rise to the level of expectations.

We believe... that college is the way for a better future for students disenfranchised communities.

WHY DO OAKLAND FAMILIES CHOOSE OAKLAND CHARTER ACADEMIES?

-OCA provides a solid education.

-Test Results and Data amongst the top in the state.

-Small, safe, and structured school sites.

-Emphasis on academics, discipline, and respect.

-A positive student culture.

-A Team centered atmosphere